



# SONDY POPE-ROBERTS

## STATE REPRESENTATIVE

### Education Committee Testimony

#### Assembly Bill 715

March 6, 2008

Thank you Chairman Davis and committee members for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of Assembly Bill 715.

Simply put, this is a proposal that would require the phase out of mercury use in our schools. As you know, mercury is one of the most toxic substances to human health, causing devastating impacts to the nervous system, heart, kidneys, lungs, and immune system of people of all ages.

Mercury is even more dangerous to children because their brains are still developing and, unfortunately, many are still being exposed to free-flowing mercury and equipment containing mercury in their schools and classrooms. The purpose of this bill is to reduce that exposure.

Mercury can be found in thermometers, barometers, Charles' law tubes, J tubes, diffusion demonstration apparatus, density demonstrations, elemental mercury. It is also found in mercury compounds such as mercurous nitrate, mercuric nitrate, mercuric oxide and solutions containing mercury such as Million's solution and Hayem diluting fluid.

Outside of the science lab and throughout the school environment mercury can also be found in light bulbs, thermostats and mercury vapor lamps.

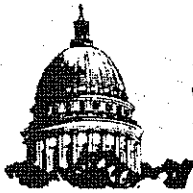
A typical Barometer contains one pound of mercury and poses a significant spill risk.

Damage to a barometer could cost the school district \$7000 to clean up. Not only are there severe health risks, but financial challenges should a spill occur.

In closing, I would like to give you a real life example of the impact that a mercury spill had in a Wisconsin school and community.

In May of 1999, a simple prank at Green Bay East High School caused four students to be hospitalized and forced another 88 to strip and enter contamination showers.

A 14 year old student stole five fluid ounces of liquid mercury from the schools science lab. Students played with the substance, rolling it around on their skin and squirting it at other students. In just one day, the mercury spread throughout the school, to homes, and to the local bowling alley. Students were held in classrooms until local firefighters could interview each one of them to determine if they had come in contact with the spill. If they had, they were required to strip, place their clothes in plastic bags and take a decontamination shower. They were then given sweatpants, sweat shirts and bedroom slippers that the staff purchased at a discount store. Five hours after the spill was detected, the last of the students were sent home. Most of the belongings that had



# SONDY POPE-ROBERTS

## STATE REPRESENTATIVE

come in contact with the mercury had to be destroyed including books, clothes, shoes and backpacks. Classes were cancelled for five days.

Mercury had been spilled on the lanes of the local bowling alley after students filled in holes of bowling balls and rolled them down the lanes. A hazardous materials response team was called in to check ten lanes and more than 450 pairs of shoes. Five days after the original spill, mercury was discovered on a sidewalk in a residential neighborhood, where it was determined the 14 year old girl who had initially stolen the hazardous material, had spilled it on her way home from school.

In addition to the scare this gave parents, students and the community and in addition to the health hazards it caused, the financial impacts were great. The owner of the bowling alley paid more than \$35,000 for clean up and equipment replacement. This does not include the cost of the loss of business.

The bill to the high school was more than \$200,000 for clean-up and decontamination. Additional bills from police and fire departments and the many families impacted by the spill added unknown additional costs.

Promoting mercury free schools is the only way to prevent "spills" such as this one from occurring again. I urge you to support this proposal and help keep our school environment safe.